



cute

* かんざきひろ画集【キュート】OREIMO & 1999-2007 ART WORKS **

A Momentary Chance Encounter

The season is fall.

""Welcome, Goshujin-sama♪""

The voices of the maids echo through inside the cafe store 'Pretty Garden'.

A 5 minute walking distance from the JR Akihabara Station. After having just finished relocating and reopening, this maid cafe's assortment of furniture were all brand new. It however, still retained the calm atmosphere from back before all the remodeling.

Cheerful, cute, but deadly serious.

The kind of place yearned by all sorts of otaku.

A different world, far removed from mundane existence.

A special place that allows for otherwise the most unfathomably unlikely of meetings to take place.

That is apparently the concept of this store, according to its owner, Hoshino Kirara.

Well, indeed for us at least--- this really was the very place of meetings, however.

I----- Kousaka Kyousuke, was participating here in this 'Pretty

Garden', to our regular meeting for the Otaku Girls Unite~. I have been pretty busy lately however, so it's actually been quite a while since our last gathering.

Sitting beside me, was Kirino, wearing clothes in an absurdly all-out fashion as usual, sitting in front of me was Saori with her true face bare, and sitting beside her was Kuroneko, in a goth loli appearance.

In this half a year, the number of people joining our 'regular meetings' has been increasing quite a bit but----- those participating here today were only the initial members.

“What were you thinking about, I wonder?”

As if seeing through my thoughts, Kuroneko speaks to me.

“No, it's just that I was feeling kind of nostalgic with us meeting up with these members like this, you know”

“Why, indeed. The first time I met everyone too---- I believe we were sitting just like this, weren't we”

Says Saori with a mixed tone between otaku and ojou-sama.

“Fufun----- who would think I would be meeting with you guys like this to this day huh~ I didn't think that would happen at all back when we first met”

Kirino, carrying her 'Battle Spoilers' too, was participating cheerfully in the conversation. And then, Kuroneko with distant eyes,

“Absolutely. Back when I first met you, I was very much under the impression you were just some obnoxious wretched bitch”

“Fu~n, and, what about now?”

“.....I can't say my impression has changed all very much, huh”

“Hey!”

Kirino and Kuroneko start squawking and bickering noisily---

I look at the two and,

“Those two just never change”

“Fufu, they're just like they were back when they first met, wouldn't you say?”

Me and Saori look over them.

“By the way, Kyouusuke-shi. What became of that 'certain matter'?”

“That 'certain matter'? Ah, you're talking about that, huh. I'm still in the middle of practicing, so wait for just a bit longer ok? To tell the truth, I already got oyaji's seal of approval but---- I want to keep practicing until I'm confident enough”

“Fumu, understood de gozaru. Security is the number one priority after all. Fufu, well in any event, Kiririn-shi gets to go first, doesn't she”

“What are you guys talking about?”

Kirino invites herself into the conversation, but I talk my way out of it saying “It's nothing”.

Disclosing my current situation, I have recently acquired a driver's license.

I'm planning on buying myself a car for the first time. And that's why

I've been so busy lately.

I've been driving with oyaji whenever there's a holiday. With the 2 of us talking about all sorts of things while driving.

And as for that 'certain matter', it's that we're planning for us all to go somewhere together with me doing the driving.

But, before that I----- hey wait, don't make me spell the whole thing out for you ok. Figure it out, ok.

And so, time passes gently.

It was a curious feeling--- as if we had a time slip back to that summer day when we first met.

But in reality, we had all changed a lot. Though that's only natural, of course.

Saori took off her glasses, and started to aggressively introduce other members to what would be best called our '2nd reserve of Otaku Girls Unite~' that is, us.

They were mostly other members from 'Otaku Girls Unite~', or from Saori's sister, Kaori-san's otaku circle 'Pretty Garden' and the like.

By the way, one of the members from 'Pretty Garden', this store's owner, Hoshino Kirara too, is also included in that circle. That's also the reason both the store and circle shared the same name.

Also, a while ago, Kuroneko, who currently attends to a high school

in Matsudo showed us a picture mail[\[1\]](#) then said 'I have recently made a friend in school, you know'.

And as expected from a friend made by Kuroneko, she seemed like a very timid-looking girl, so Kuroneko reluctantly said, “It's still too early to allow her to meet Kirino”.

And as for both me and Kirino, we----

“More importantly! That wedding dress figure I bought just now! WOOOOOOOOOOOOOWWWWWW! Just what is this! It's super cute, you know! This box is way out of this world! So much detailed work on every nook and cranny too! Ku ~~~~ the makers really know what they're doing~! I guess I really should buy one more for preserving! Slurp!”

.....This imouto. She really hasn't changed much at all, huh.

For today's route, we were going around bookstores. Kuroneko was the one who suggested it, saying, “One of the series I really enjoyed reading, had been on hold all this time, but they finally released a new volume just recently, so I'm going to buy that”.

We left Pretty Garden, and were in the middle of walking toward our goal, when Kirino starts talking to Kuroneko.

“Are there no bookstores in Matsudo, or something? There's no reason for you to come all the way to Akiba just to buy it, you

know”

“Since I had plans to go out with all of you, I thought this would the most favorable time to go buy it. That is all”

“If you were looking forward to it so much, shouldn't you want to read it as soon as ---- ah, haha~~ I get it now”

“.....what is it?”

“You just want to talk with me about the book you like, isn't it~”

“.....”

“Fuhihi, aha, bulls-eye”

“Stop bothering me..... I'll curse you”

Kuroneko faces away, blushing, then starts walking really fast. And even though she should have just quit it, Kirino goes after Kuroneko, poking and teasing her.

The place we arrived, was a certain bookstore's light novel corner. This month's recently released titles were all lined up flat. And standing high in the center of the new publications, were the greatly popular series piled up in the form of towers, making for some sort of art in its own right.

The covers brandishing a variety of colors---- the cute girls, the cool looking protagonists, the wording for every title, all of it painstakingly worked on by professionals.

This scenery that enraptures you just by glancing at isn't limited to only this bookstore, you can see it all over the place, here in Akiba.

Kirino hurriedly trots off. And with sparkling eyes,

“This kind of new release corner sure is exciting, isn't it! I was actually thinking about checking out on an Artbook by an illustrator-san I like myself, you know. But now, I wanna get some light novels too.

Maybe I should buy any novels I see that have nice covers huh~~”

“Is it just me, or could it be that this sham of a light novel ota[2] who's only after illustrations is actually trying to say something, I wonder?”

Kuroneko squints her eyes towards Kirino, as if to say “For all intents and purpose, what really matters in a novel is actually the writing, you know”.

“Mm, I understand. Looks like Kuroneko-shi as a writer, doesn't care for Kiririn-shi's way of buying novels based on what their illustrations look like, huh”

Despite Saori's additional explanation, Kirino without any sign of reconsideration responds like this.

“But, it's not like you can know what the content is like until you buy it and read it yourself, can you? You look at the cover~, you go completely crazy~, and go like, 'Uwa! I want it!' I personally think that's a perfectly healthy way to go about it, you know? Even with anime, you look at things like the PV[3], and because you found it 'interesting', that you decide to try out watching just one episode, you know”

“That may be true, but from the bottom of my heart, I just can't seem to agree with you. Otherwise I'll end up understanding what the authors feel as they self-deprecatingly say things like 'It's actually only selling thanks to the illustrations'. Even though the writing is obviously more important....it's quite irritating.”

“What I'm saying is that it just means both of them are important, all right? Even those hard cover novels with no illustrations go through the hands of several people before they get to the readers, you know. So you can't just go around making that face like it's all the work of a single person, ok? Especially with light novels---- there are those doing the writing, those making the illustrations, those who line up the books all pretty like this, the bookstore clerks who recommend them through POP advertising---- there are us, the readers too. I really think it's something made by all of us together, you know”

“.....hun, our opinions just can't seem to match, huh”

“For example~, how about if the illustrations were to be my face, and the writing, my heart---what would you say, then? Fufun--- both are important, right?”

“.....I'm completely convinced by what you said just now. Why, if you lost that beautiful face of yours, the only thing remaining would be that bitch heart of yours, after all”

“What part of me are you calling a bitch!? Just what are you saying to this super pure otome[\[4\]](#) Kiririn standing in front of you!”

“..... pure?”

Kuroneko tilts her neck in doubt. And then, mutters with a scary low

voice.

“All the women who dare to brag about their love life before me are bitches, all right?”

“Wait! I haven't be, be, be, be, been bragging at all, you hear!”

“Yes, you have. Why, specifically speaking, that Sunday last week---”

“Da~~! Sto~~~~p! You can't talk about that! You definitely ca~~n't!”

Kirino covers up Kuroneko's mouth, panicking.

Mmph, Mmph, Kuroneko's distressed voice escapes out, as her face grows redder and redder.

Saori appearing to be very nervous said,

“Ki, Kiririn-shi! If you cover her mouth li, like this, she won't be able breathe de gozaru! Are you intending on strangling Kuroneko-shi down!?”

“Bu, bu, bu, bu, but Kuroneko's going to.....!”

And right there, suddenly, Kirino with her face completely red, glares at me, and shouts out in a really loud voice.

“I haven't been bragging at all, okay!”

.....I get it already, just stop making a scene in the bookstore, all right.

While also making rowdy exchanges like these on the way, we had

finally finished doing our shopping, and were now walking toward the station. Kuroneko bought a copy of the book she was after, Saori appears to have bought a magazine about plastic modeling.

And as for Kirino, she got that illustrator-san's Artbook, game magazines, and in addition to that, she also got one copy of every novel with covers she liked from the new publication corner.

And of course, the one carrying pretty much everything is me.

The one thing Kirino was actually holding was----

“Hey, look at this light novel, this is definitely a good one. There's only one volume out right now, and yet this bookstore was already making deals with it, and the illustrations are super, super, super ero kawaii too! I think I can expect really great things from this one!”

It was a light novel she had bought just now.

There was a cute girl with silver hair drawn on the cover.

It was one of those so-called imouto novels that Kirino likes so much.

“.....Kukuku. I can indeed sense an extremely powerful soul embedded in that illustration. But what about the content lying underneath, I wonder? As far as I know, this is only a small fry author that even someone as well versed as me, am just barely aware of his existence, you know. Not to mention that he appears to have changed his genre from his last works----- So, whether it will be actually interesting or not, is still quite uncertain”

“Huh? His last work was at least decent compared to that crap anime whose original work you just bought, you hear”

“For you information, the original work is actually really interesting! So, could you please stop jumping to conclusions based on having watched just the anime!?”

“he~e, if you're willing to say that much, then I guess I'll give you the honor of me reading that novel of yours. Let's switch novels once I finish reading this book, ok?”

“.....Very well. I accept your challenge”

It was a quarrel that closely resembled the ones they had back when they first met---- and yet, it was also decisively different from the quarrels they had back then.

Looks like these two's relationship too.....has changed a lot over the years they spent together.

And smilingly, my sight set on the two,“-----”

Suddenly, turned to a boy walking ahead.

I wonder why, huh? It's not like he had any unique features like the 3 walking with me.

The boy who looked like he was either a 3rd grade junior high, or 1st grade high school student, was carrying with great care a tablet computer with both hands, while muttering something alone.

Looking from the sidelines, it could also look like he was ----talking to the computer.

I wonder if he's connected to 'someone', or something?

His face had a tint of blue, he was very nervous, and he was walking heavily to what appeared to be the bookstore.

That kind of sight was something I knew all too well.

It was on that unforgettable summer day.

The day I came to this city for the first time.

No need for you to look so uneasy. Don't worry about it, I'll be watching over you.

I, I'm not uneasy at all. Why don't you stop being such a big dummy and go already?

-----I almost called out to him.

Geez, there really must be something wrong with me today.

How could I possibly have just lumped together this stranger who I have absolutely no connection with, to the image of my imouto of all things.

In the end, without neither me calling out to him, nor him calling out to me.

“-----”

We and the boy passed by each other.

In that instant, it looked like the boy looked at Kirino.

It appears he was looking at the light novel Kirino was boasting about proudly.

After walking forward a bit, I looked back just once.

And just like me, the boy also turned back.

And when his eyes and mine met, the boy with a faint smile, bows slightly.

----Thank you very much.

It looked like his mouth moved to say those words. But it's not like I could hear his voice, so I could only be mistaken.

But,

After turning his back to me, it looked his steps as he entered the bookstore, had now become very light.

“Hey, what are you standing there spacing out like that for!? I'm gonna leave you behind, you hear!”

“Ah, sorry, my bad, my bad----”

It's a nice weather we're having today; it's just the kind of wonderful weather that makes you feel like reading a book.

And under the blinding sunlight-----

I started walking, toward my imouto.

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AFTER STORY &
INTERVIEW

References

↑ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shu-Mail>

↑ Short for Otaku.

↑ "PV" is short for "Promotional Video", in this case, a preview of the anime.

↑ Otome (乙女) means girl.